



Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Return to Work Procedure

1. Purpose

This procedure establishes the mandatory steps for early, safe and sustainable recovery at work, and return to work practices following a work-related injury or illness.

It sets out how the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat will support workers who are injured or become ill through work and assist early, safe and sustainable recover at work, or return to work, in a way that is respectful, practical and legally compliant.

It gives effect to the applicable Victorian occupational health and safety and workers compensation requirements, while ensuring that the correct employing entity remains accountable for its legal obligations.

For the purposes of this document the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat, covers clergy, employees, leaders and managers, volunteers, contractors, sub-contractors, religious, parishioners and representatives of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat (workforce participants).

2. Scope and accountable employer

This procedure applies to the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat and each participating parish but does not make them a single employer.

At the start of every case, the employing entity must be identified and recorded together with the workplace, responsible local leader, WorkSafe policy and Agent, and appointed Return to Work Coordinator.

The Diocese may provide central advice, templates or coordination; this does not transfer a parish employer's statutory obligations.

Coverage includes employees and any other person who meets the applicable workers compensation definition, including labour-hire workers where relevant.

Clergy and members of religious institutes are supported under equivalent rehabilitation principles where statutory coverage does not apply.

Volunteers, contractors, parishioners and visitors remain covered by occupational health and safety arrangements, but this procedure does not imply statutory workers compensation entitlement where none exists.

A parish workplace includes parish offices, presbyteries where work occurs, churches, halls and community centres, grounds, work-related events, approved remote work and other locations managed or controlled by the relevant employer.

3. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Employer	The legal employing entity responsible for the worker and the recover at work and return-to-work duties in the case.
Employment obligation period	The aggregate 52-week period during which the employer must provide suitable or pre-injury employment, subject to the legislation's commencement rules, exclusions and exemptions.
Injured worker	A worker who has suffered a work-related injury or illness.
Pre-injury employment	Employment in the same or an equivalent position to that held before the injury.
Suitable employment	Employment consistent with the worker's current capacity, restrictions and circumstances, assessed against medical information, available work and safety risks.
Return to Work Coordinator	A competent person appointed by the employer, where required, to coordinate planning, consultation, monitoring, records and liaison. For Catholic Diocese of Ballarat this will be the local leader or alternative delegate, who will work with our Insurer to appoint specialist occupational rehabilitation service provision.
Return to work plan	A current written record of duties, hours, restrictions, controls, responsibilities, consultation outcomes, review dates and return-to-work goals.
Agent	Catholic Diocese of Ballarat's Workers Compensation Insurance Agency

4. Commitments and statutory obligations

The Catholic Diocese of Ballarat is committed to supporting injured workers to recover at work and return to work wherever possible.

We recognise that safe and meaningful recovery and return to work is generally in the best interests of the worker and the organisation.

We will respond with care, protect dignity, maintain confidentiality, and take reasonable steps to support suitable work whilst the injured worker is recovering and return to work planning wherever safe and reasonably practicable.



Catholic Diocese of Ballarat's Return to Work Procedure

During the employment obligation period, the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat's local leader must provide suitable employment where the worker has current work capacity and, when incapacity ends, provide the same or equivalent pre-injury employment, subject to applicable statutory exceptions.

The employment obligation period is an aggregate 52 weeks and begins on the earliest applicable statutory trigger, including receipt of a valid certificate of capacity, receipt of a claim for weekly payments, or notification by WorkSafe or the Agent of the claim or certificate. The Return-to-Work Coordinator must obtain Agent advice before applying exclusions, pauses or exemptions.

Catholic Diocese of Ballarat's local leader must plan the worker's return, consult, appoint a competent alternative coordinator when required, make prescribed return-to-work information available, notify the Agent when required, resolve return-to-work issues and cooperate with a labour-hire employer where relevant.

5. Immediate response and case activation

When a worker is injured or unwell because of work, early contact should occur as soon as reasonably practicable. This includes checking on the worker's wellbeing, explaining available supports, ensuring required reporting and claim processes are completed, and starting return to work planning where appropriate.

The below summarises the required steps when a worker is injured or falls ill because of a workplace incident.

1. Arrange immediate care and emergency assistance where necessary.
2. Record the event in the applicable incident or hazard report and Register of Injuries.

[Link Catholic Diocese of Ballarat's Incident reporting Form](#)

3. Preserve a notifiable-incident site and notify WorkSafe immediately where legally required.

[Link https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/notifiable-incidents-under-occupational-health-and-safety-act-2004](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/notifiable-incidents-under-occupational-health-and-safety-act-2004)

4. Notify the responsible local leader, the Diocesan OHS advisor contact and the Business Manager, insurer or Agent without delay.
5. Local Leader to identify the return-to-work coordinator, contact the worker promptly, explain available support and claims steps, and agree respectful communication arrangements.
6. Obtain current capacity information and activate return-to-work planning as soon as there is an incapacity or work restriction.



6. Mandatory return-to-work planning

The local leader, with support from Diocesan OHS advisor and Business Manager, will plan the worker's return to work to the extent that it is reasonable to do so. Planning may include obtaining information about capacity for work, considering workplace supports or modifications, identifying suitable duties, confirming return to work arrangements, and monitoring progress over time.

The local leader or the assigned Return-to-Work Coordinator must assess and propose employment, provide the worker with clear, accurate and current written arrangements, and repeat these steps as often as necessary.

A written plan must be prepared before duties commence or change, supplied to the worker and responsible manager, and retained on the confidential case file.

The plan must record current capacity and restrictions; expected duration; proposed duties and hours; travel, medication and treatment needs; workplace supports; available work; responsible persons; consultation outcomes; controls; review dates; and the goal of returning to pre-injury employment where possible.

Every proposed duty must be risk assessed in consultation with the worker, involved treating practitioners and other relevant people the worker identifies.

The assessment must consider manual-handling and environmental hazards, psychological health factors, fatigue, travel, medication, treatment, aggravation or recurrence of injury or illness.

A duty must be ceased, redesigned or modified if it creates an unreasonable risk, and no worker may be assigned work outside their certified capacity.

7. Consultation and consent

The employer must consult, to the extent reasonably practicable, with the worker and—subject to the worker's authority or consent—the treating health practitioner and occupational rehabilitation provider. The worker may choose a support person or representative, other than a legal practitioner, to assist. Consultation must share relevant information, provide a reasonable opportunity to express views, genuinely consider those views and record the outcome or reasonable attempts made.



8. Suitable and pre-injury employment

When the worker has current work capacity, the employer must provide suitable employment to the extent required by law. Options should be considered in the following order:

- same employer and same job;
- same employer and similar duties;
- same employer and different duties at the same workplace or another workplace of the employer;
- then, with Agent support, employment with a new employer if all reasonable options with the injured worker's employer have been exhausted.

Once the worker no longer has an incapacity, the employer must provide the same or equivalent pre-injury employment during the obligation period, subject to any lawful exception.

A proposed arrangement does not commence until capacity, hazards, controls, supervision and review arrangements are documented and communicated.

9. Coordinator, information and Agent notifications

Each employer/ local leader must appoint a competent Return to Work Coordinator when required and ensure they have adequate authority, access, training, time and coverage.

A competent central or shared coordinator may support small or dispersed parishes, provided the legal employer appoints the coordinator and retains accountability. Workers must be told the coordinator's name and contact details and be given accessible, current WorkSafe return-to-work information at induction, when an injury is reported and on request.

The Return-to-Work Coordinator must notify the Agent promptly when a worker who has been receiving weekly payments for no current work capacity returns to work, and when the current weekly earnings of a worker receiving weekly payments change. The notification and confirmation must be recorded.

10. Worker participation, labour hire and issue resolution

The injured worker must participate in return-to-work planning and consultation, make reasonable efforts to return to work in suitable or pre-injury employment, use occupational rehabilitation services where required, comply with reasonable arrangements and provide current capacity information.

Any concern about participation must first be discussed respectfully with the worker and the Agent; no adverse conclusion is to be made without procedural fairness and consideration of medical and other relevant circumstances.

Where a labour-hire / contractor / sub-contractor worker is involved, the host and labour-hire employer must exchange relevant information, cooperate in identifying safe duties and controls, consult the worker, and document who is responsible for each action. If a return-to-

work issue arises, the worker and employer must try to resolve it promptly using the workplace's agreed issue-resolution procedure.

If none exists, they must use the applicable Ministerial Direction process. Namely:

- The coordinator records the issue, views agreed actions, timeframes and escalates to the Agent or WorkSafe.

11. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Legal employer / diocesan or parish leadership	Identify the duty-holder who provides employment; plan and consult with the injured worker; appoint a competent return to work coordinator; provide information to the return-to-work coordinator and the injured worker; notify the Agent; resolve issues; and assure compliance.
Local Leader	Activate the local response; ensure reporting and care; work with the parish manager, Diocesan OHS advisor or Business Manager and return to work coordinator; implement safe duties and controls; monitor progress; and escalate concerns.
Return to Work Coordinator	Coordinate consultation, capacity information, risk assessment, written plans, communications, records, reviews, Agent notifications and issue resolution.
Injured Worker's Manager / supervisor	Provide practical job information, implement duties and controls, supervise safely, maintain agreed contact and promptly report changes or concerns.
Injured Worker	Participate in return-to-work planning and processes, provide current capacity information, comply with safe agreed alternative work arrangements, report difficulties and make reasonable efforts to recover at or return to work.
Parish Finance Council or other advisory body	Monitor and provide assurance where requested. An advisory body does not assume or displace the employer's statutory duties.



12. Confidentiality, records, monitoring and closure

Collect only information reasonably required for claims, safety and return-to-work purposes.

Obtain and record authority / injured worker's consent before seeking health information unless otherwise lawfully authorised.

Limit access of these records / information to people with a need to know; store records securely and separately from general personnel records; disclose only for an authorised or lawful purpose; and retain and dispose of records under applicable legal and records-management requirements.

The return-to-work coordinator reviews the plan on each stated review date and whenever capacity, duties, treatment, risk or workplace circumstances change.

A case closes only when the goal is achieved, responsibility transfers under an agreed pathway, or the Agent confirms the employer's obligations have ended; the outcome and any unresolved controls must be recorded.

13. Related documents, governance and review

Related documents include:

- Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Workplace Health and Safety Policy (one page)
- Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Workplace Health and Safety Policy – Principle Based
- Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Incident Reporting and Investigation Procedure;
- Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Register of Injuries and incident or hazard forms;
- Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Hazard Identification, Risk Assessment and Risk Control Procedure
- WorkSafe return-to-work information – [Link https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/return-to-work](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/return-to-work);; and
- Appendix 1.

The document owner must review this procedure at least every two years and earlier following legislative, WorkSafe, insurer or organisational change, a serious incident, an identified compliance failure or evidence that arrangements are ineffective. The employing entity must verify all policy details, Agent contacts and local delegations before approval.

Document owner	[Insert Diocesan role]	Version	1
Approval date	[Insert]	Next review date	[Insert]